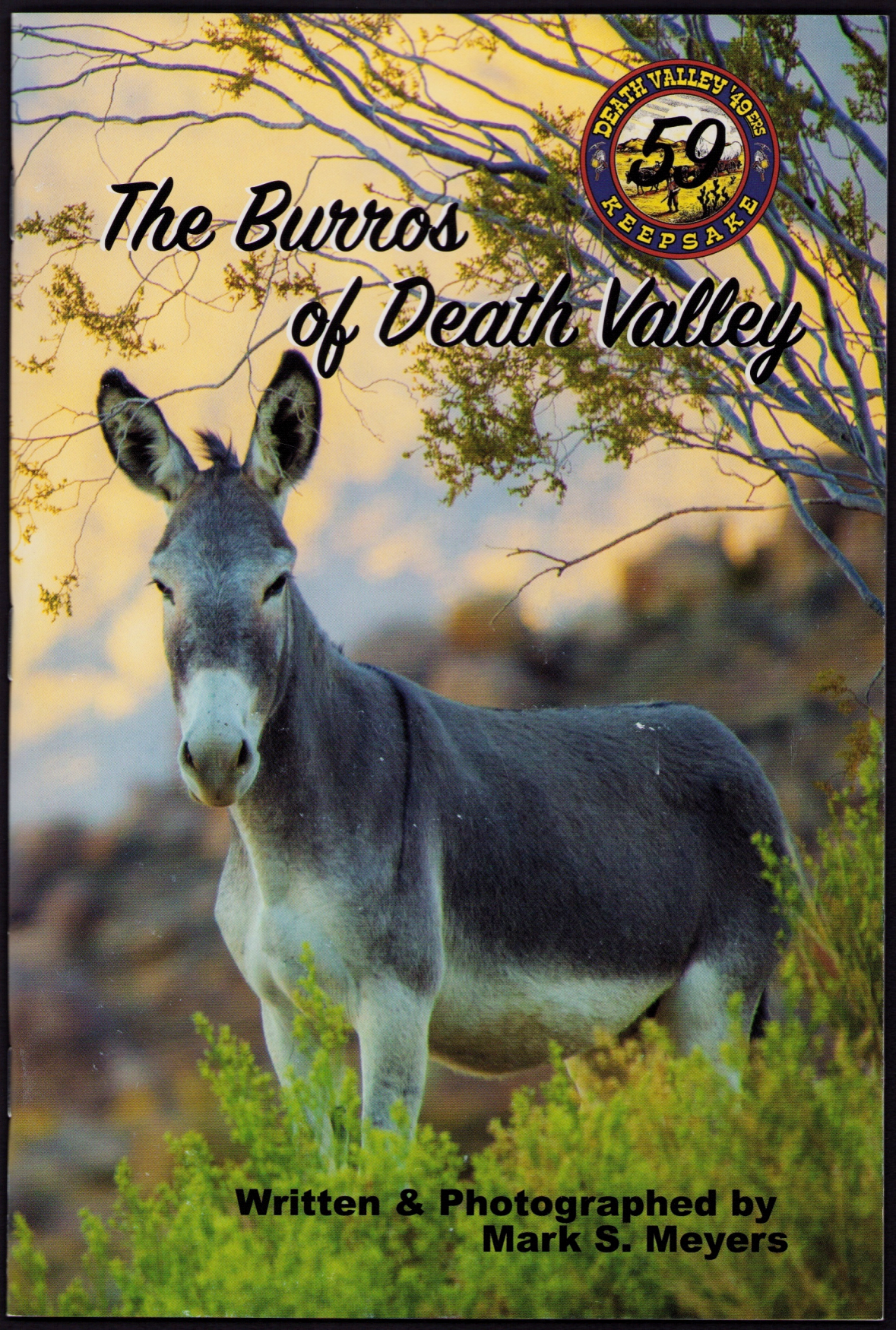

The Burros of Death Valley

Written & Photographed by
Mark S. Meyers

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KEEPSAKE No. 59

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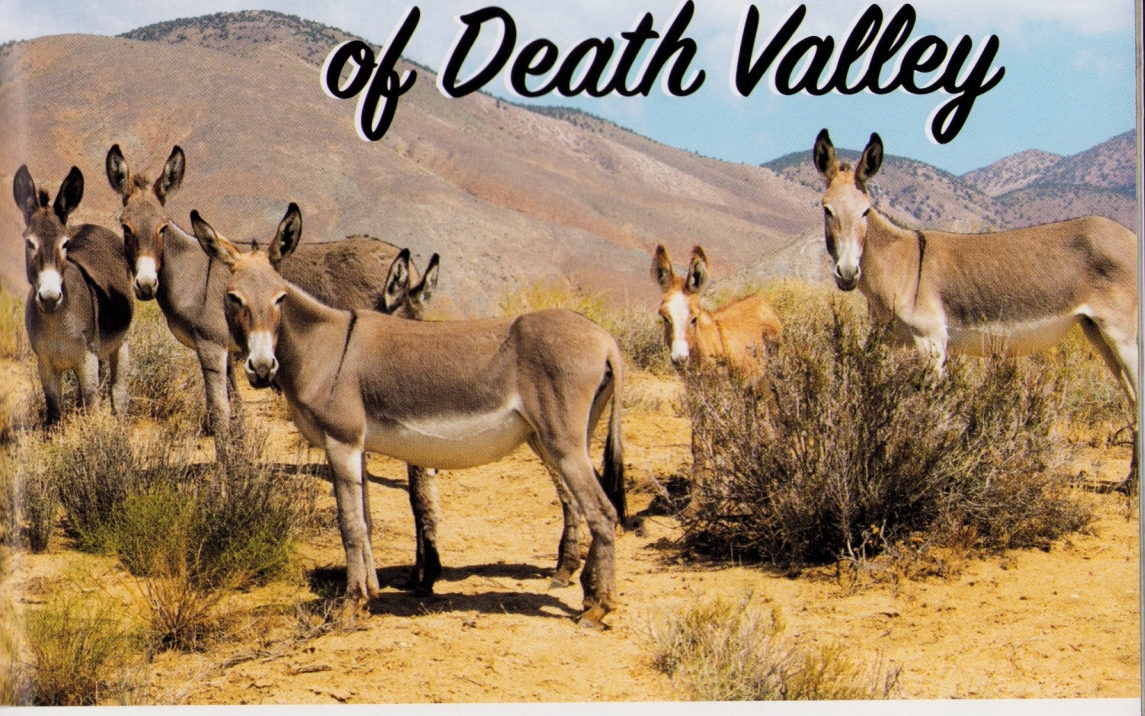
The Burros of Death Valley



Written, Photographed & Designed
by Mark S. Meyers
Executive Director
Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue

In Commemoration of the
70th Death Valley '49ers Encampment

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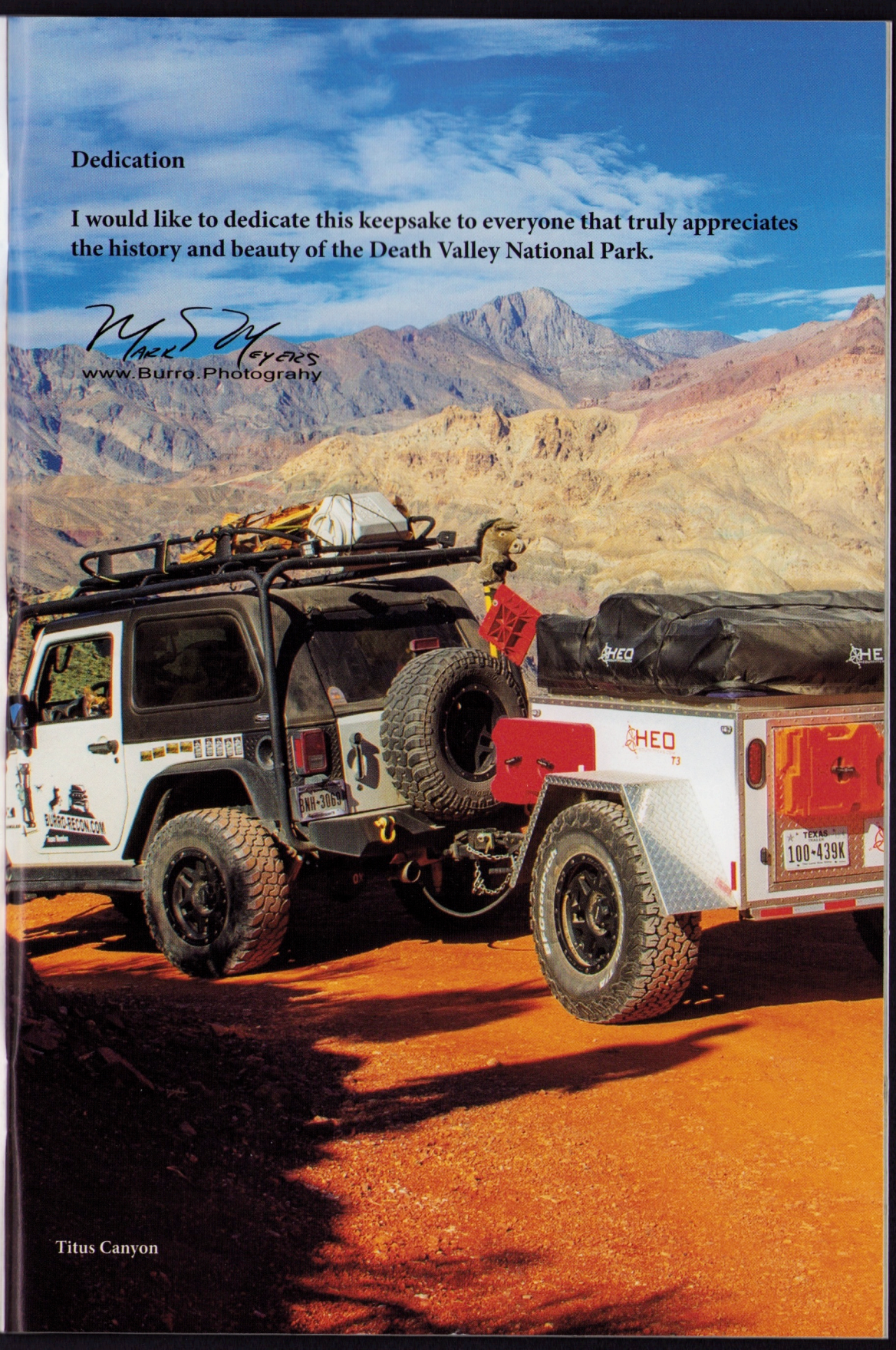
About the author:
Mark Meyers is the Executive Director of the Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue (PVDR), a nonprofit animal charity. PVDR is currently capturing the wild burros in Death Valley, the Mojave National Preserve, Fort Irwin, NASA Goldstone and others. To learn more about PVDR's work please visit www.donkeyrescue.org

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this keepsake to everyone that truly appreciates the history and beauty of the Death Valley National Park.

Mark S Meyers
www.Burro.Photograhy



Titus Canyon

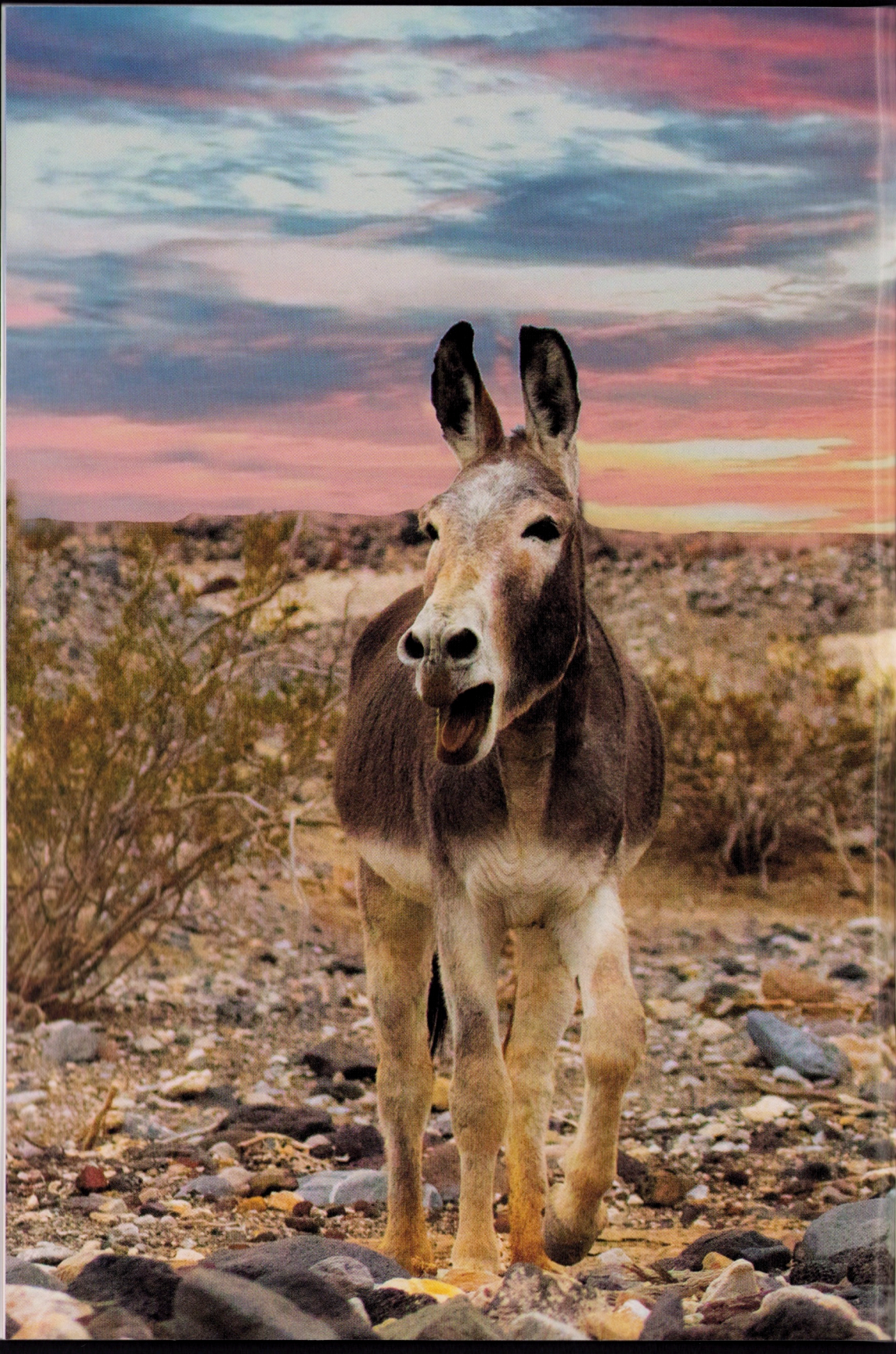


Table of Contents

Preface..... 7

History of the Donkey..... 9

Wild Burro Behavior..... 11

Wild Horse and Burro Act..... 13

Protected versus Unprotected..... 15

Why do the Burros Need to be Removed?..... 17

Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue's Wild Burro Project..... 19

The Reconnaissance..... 21

The Capture..... 23

The Staging Area..... 25

Freeze Branding..... 27

Transition From Wild to Domestic Life..... 29

Project Sanctuary..... 31

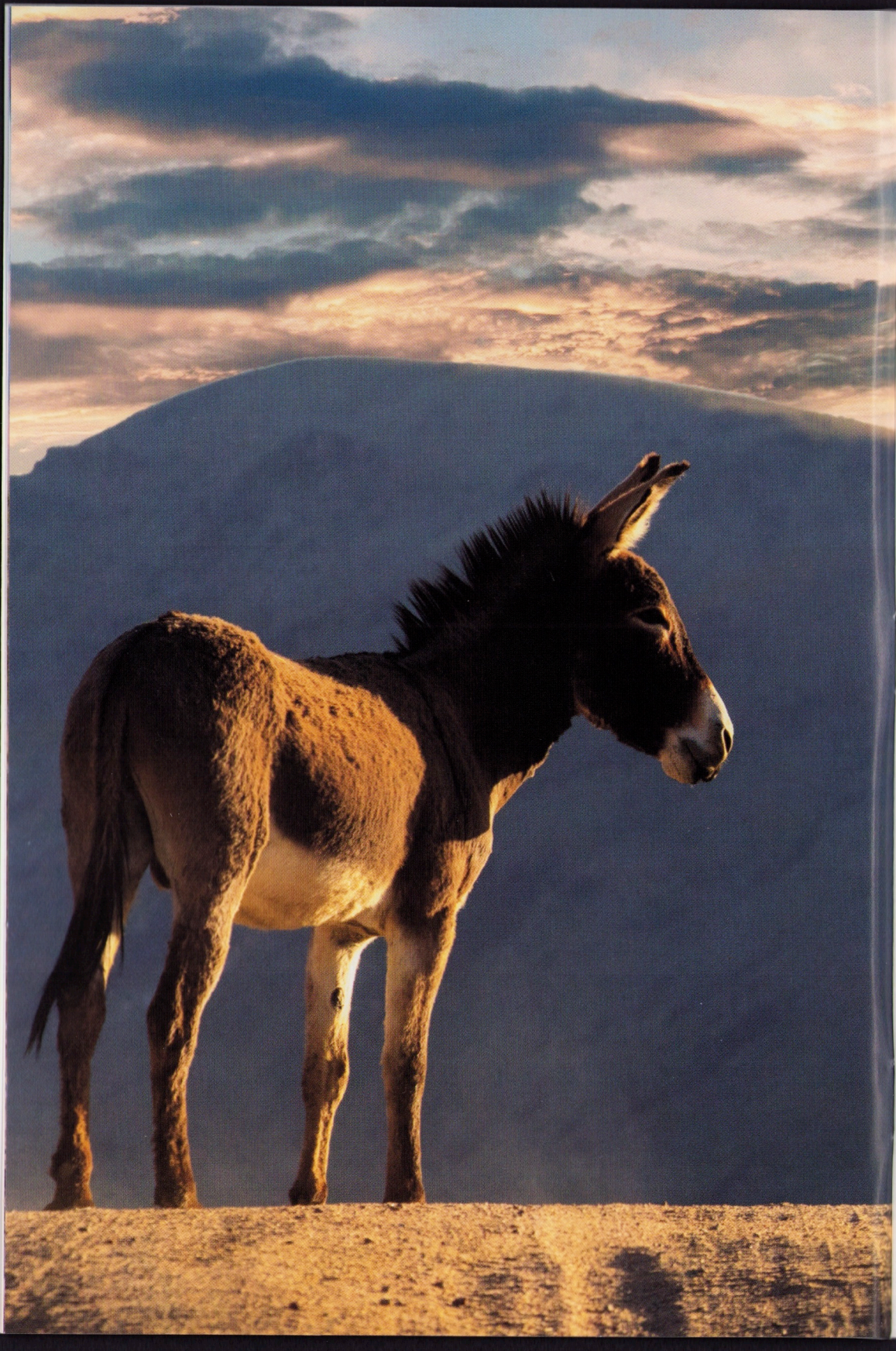
Human and Wild Burro Conflicts..... 33

Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue..... 34

Celebrating 70 Years Of The Death Valley '49ers..... 35

Getting Involved With the Death Valley '49ers..... 36

"Morning Fire" Saline Valley, DVNP



Preface

Mark Meyers and Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue have taken on the task of humanely removing the wild burros, which the National Park Service considers a "non-native" species, a position not shared by all.

The heritage of our ancestors is important to pass on from one generation to another. This heritage includes the use of livestock for expansion of many countries. The wild burros of Death Valley are ancestors of those animals that participated in the settlement and growth of California. As you read this keepsake, you will discover the historical impact the burros made and the importance of their survival.

Pioneers and miners used the burro as a way of travel and as a tool in many businesses as the West was expanded. My ancestors traveled by covered wagon pulled by oxen through Death Valley in 1849 with the Jayhawker Party. They settled in California and provided goods to many trades by opening up a livery/stagecoach stable and supplies warehouse in Alviso.

I have been fortunate to travel throughout Death Valley on foot, by car, jeep, horse and covered wagon. I have had the opportunity to see the vastness of the park and much of the wildlife that lives throughout. I have also been blessed to be around burros and donkeys and I have learned how smart, strong willed and affectionate these animals are.

I have mixed emotions as to the need for removal of all the wild burros that roam freely on our public lands. We are all visitors to the National Parks so to pick and choose who and what is allowed in them becomes a struggle that needs to be managed.

Thank you Mark and staff from all your "Long-Ears" supporters for taking on this incredible project.

Janette Jensen
Harry Wade Descendent

History of the Donkey

Donkeys were first domesticated around 3,000 BC, either in Egypt or Mesopotamia. This comes well after the domestication of cattle, sheep and goats. As this region was the center of civilization, donkeys were traded, spread out and become beasts of burden throughout the known world. Unlike cattle (oxen) that must have time to chew their cud, donkeys became the favored mode of transportation of both people and goods. Donkeys became so popular in Egyptian culture that one of the first Pharaohs, either King Narmer or King Hor-Aha, was buried with ten donkeys in a way that was typically reserved for high ranking people.

In 1493, Columbus brought the first donkeys to the Western Hemisphere on his second voyage and unloaded them on Hispaniola, modern day Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Transportation, mining and agriculture were their primary uses and became an indispensable part of the Caribbean economic wealth. The majority of Caribbean Islands have donkeys populations and very few of these herds are managed. Various relocation, birth control and euthanasia projects have been tried at various times with little success.

In 1598, Spanish explorer Juan de Oñate crossed the Rio Grande with what were probably the first donkeys ever to step foot on what is now the United States. Subsequent expeditions soon followed and the donkeys were used, traded and no doubt escaped into the wilds. This established the first populations of donkeys in North America , both domestic and wild. Having evolved in the extreme deserts of Africa, the donkeys were well suited to North America's southwestern deserts. Being able to live and thrive in extreme weather has allowed them to gain a strong foothold on the remotest parts of our country.

With the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in 1848, the gold craze soon consumed the population. Donkeys quickly became the animal of choice as many mines were in the more arid climates. Donkeys have the ability to go days with out water, lose over 30% of their body weight due to dehydration and gain it back quickly at the next available water source. They can smell water over great distances and can dig holes deep underground to find hidden springs. Donkeys are extremely sure footed on rocky slopes, this is due in part to the placement of their eyes more on the sides of their head. They are also capable of carrying 20%-30% of their body weight on their backs.

It was a common practice in Death Valley for a prospector to strike it rich, release his donkeys, head to the nearest bar and drink himself into oblivion. Once broke and hungover, he would return to his claim, catch himself a few donkeys running loose and go back to work. In the age of mechanical achievement, donkeys were no longer needed and were released to fend for themselves.

Wild Burro Behavior

Burros behave differently based on their environment. This includes the availability of forage, water sources, conflicts with people and predatory wildlife. In North America in the regions populated with burros, predation for the most part, is pretty low. Mountain lions are the top of the food chain with coyotes being several rungs down. When the burros are all removed, the biggest impact will be to the big horn sheep population as the lions will have fewer choices to hunt.

Donkeys have a "fight" instinct whereas a horse has a "flight" instinct. Donkeys do not blindly run away from danger, but stay in visual contact with the perceived threat and determine the best course of action. They are a wildlife photographer's dream. They look you in the eye and give the best poses found anywhere in the animal kingdom.

Herds are typically matriarchal, with an older dominant jennet in control. Female offspring stay with their mothers while male offspring are driven out around 9-12 months. This is nature's way of limiting inbreeding. Older jacks, those past their prime, will be allowed to stay with the herd year round so that they can share in the safety of numbers. Jacks usually form bachelor groups and stay in loose packs. Rough play is pretty common amongst jacks, but can get very heated when the jennets are in season. Torn ears and scarred necks are indicators of the many battles each jack has had.

Jennets typically have only one foal, twins are very rare. The gestation is from 11-14 months and can vary depending on severe weather, availability of water and safety issues. Jennets can be re-bred within weeks of giving birth. On average, especially in areas of plentiful resources and low predation, a jennet can have one foal each calendar year. It is common to see an older jennet with a yearling and a foal at her side. Jennets can start reproducing as young as two years of age. On the conservative side if a jennet lived to be 20 years old, most live much longer, she can produce 18 foals in her lifetime. If half of her offspring are jennets and they can each produce 18 foals, it is easy to see how quickly the population can expand. The rule of thumb is that a wild burro population will double in size each four years.

Burros in areas of sparse forage will tend to travel from water source to water source grazing along the way. They can comfortably go without water for three days. Experienced hikers know that if they follow a burro trail, it will eventually lead them to water. Springs in harsh climates, like Death Valley, are often inaccessible because of the vegetation growth that they promote. Burros will tunnel into these dense thickets to get to the water. This is seen by many as being a benefit to all animals. This access to water is open to sheep, coyotes, smaller animals and birds.

Edited from "Four Of A Kind" Wildrose Canyon, DVNP

Wild Horse and Burro Act

Prior to obtaining protected status, wild horses, and to a lesser extent burros, were routinely shot, harassed and rounded up for slaughter. Ranchers felt that the horses were in direct competition with their livestock's grazing. Velma Bronn Johnston, also know as Wild Horse Annie, started a movement to stop the decimation of the wild horse and burro herds. In 1950, while driving to work, she witnessed a trailer full of horses dripping blood onto the highway. She followed it to a slaughterhouse where she learned that the wild horses had been gathered from Nevada's Virginia Range on state owned land. This ignited her passion to save America's wild equine populations.

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 was enacted by Congress and signed into law by President Richard Nixon on December 18, 1971. Prior to the passage of this Act, wild horses and burros were often mistreated, killed and rounded up in cruel ways to then be sold for slaughter. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was tasked with enforcing the protection of this Act, taking census and establishing a balance between the wild equids, livestock crazing, public use as well as protecting the natural resources in each area.

Herd Management Areas (HMAs) were established on public lands. Population numbers were considered and round ups started shortly there after. Besides protecting the horses and burros, the BLM was also responsible for adopting the animals into pre-screened homes. In 1973 a pilot program was launched on the Pryor Range in Montana to adopt excess wild mustangs. It was so successful, that the BLM expanded the Adopt-a-Horse initiative all across the country. Unfortunately, 46 years after its implementation, the BLM now has 46,000 excess horses in storage at a tax payer cost of $2,000 per horse per year. Burros are not being stored at the same excessive numbers, but there are still 1,800 in storage as of the release of this book.

In 2004, Montana Senator Conrad Burns inserted specific language into a spending bill that drastically changed the Wild Horse and Burro Act. Any wild horse or burro over 10 years of age or unsuccessfully offered for adoption three times shall be sold. The Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue has purchased well over 700 of the BLM Sale Burros over the years.

As of the printing of this book, the Bureau of Land Management is offering $1,000 to people willing to adopt a mustang. The "Adopter" will receive $500 at the time of adoption and $500 after title to the animal transfers in one year's time. It remains to be seen if this project will be successful, or if these horses will end up in the never ending horse slaughter market.

Protected versus Unprotected

A free-roaming horse or burro residing on land administered by the Bureau of Land Management or US Forest Service is considered "Protected" under the 1971 Wild Horse and Burro Act. This means that they cannot be harassed or removed from public lands, without consent of the Secretary of the Interior. If the horses or burros leave the BLM's or USFS's land, they lose their protected status. BLM Sale Horses and Burros also lose their protected status and given a separate US neck brand to indicate the animal's unprotected status.

The Department of Interior has several operating units. The main three that concern burros are:
The Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
The National Park Service (NPS)
US Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS)

All operating units of the Department of Interior report to the Secretary of the Interior. The Secretary is a political appointee and is part of the President's Cabinet. Each Secretary has the capacity to make major policy changes in line with the current administration's policy platform. The Department of Interior manages 65% of our public lands with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) managing the other 30%. The remainder is Department of Defense and other agencies.

The Bureau of Land Management manages 247.3 million acres. The mission of the BLM is "to sustain the health diversity and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations". Horses and burros living on BLM land are federally protected.

The National Park Service plays a dual role. One is to protect the ecological and historical integrity of the places entrusted to them, while also making them available to the public. For reasons we will discuss later, burros are not federally protected on NPS administered lands. NPS oversees 418 places, 60 of which are designated as National Parks.

US Fish & Wildlife Service's mission is "working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people". This is taken to mean "native" fish and wildlife. Burros are not federally protected on USF&W's lands.

As the burros in one area are gathered, many will leave as a result of the pressure. Once the gather is complete, they will simply return. If the capture is 100% successful, burros from adjacent land will move in due to lack of competition.

Why do the Burros Need to be Removed?

In 1974, a National Park Service biologist named Peter Sanchez conducted a study on areas around Death Valley National Monument, this was before it was expanded and designated a park. He fenced off areas to keep the burros out and recorded the differences in the vegetation both inside the areas where there were no burros and outside where there were burros. His findings and subsequent report are referred to as "Impact of Feral Burros on the Death Valley Ecosystem" or more simply "Sanchez '74" and form the basis for the Park Service's "Zero Horse and Burro" policy.

Citing damage to natural springs, overgrazing on native plants and competition with native wildlife, particularly bighorn sheep, the National Park Service created the policy that no horses or burros should be allowed in any National Park. The earliest recorded burro round up in Death Valley was in 1938. Historically, once each decade another capture would be performed. Because of the cost of the roundups, the Park Service could not afford to do smaller continual roundups each year and the burros would inevitably return. The last roundup conducted in the Park was in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

US Fish and Wildlife's policy of protecting native species places horses and burros in direct conflict for resources with deer, elk, antelope and bighorn sheep. As the burros are not federally protected, the burros are under constant threat. Peaceful Valley removed over 500 burros from the Sheldon Antelope Refuge in Northern Nevada from 2004-2015. USF&WS manages 89,000,000 acres containing 562 national refuges and 38 wetland management districts. Many of these contain burro populations.

Fort Irwin claims to have a wild burro population of several thousand. The burros interfere with the tank target practice as they use the tank targets for shade. They were also disrupting drone operations by standing on the landing strip. The majority of the burros water sources were shut off or fenced in hopes that the burros would move off of the fort. Instead it drove them into town to become an even bigger nuisance. A university study performed on Fort Irwin included the branding of numbers on the burros rear ends. The burros were then released north of the fort. PVDR has captured some of these burros as far away as the southern portion of the Mojave National Preserve a trek of 100 miles and required the crossing of Interstate 15.

Burros are an important part of our Nation's history, but the fact remains that they are not indiginous, have very low predation and compete for the limited resources of their desert habitat. Reasonable management based on real scientific evidence is necessary for the preservation of the burro and the native wildlife.

"A New Arrival" Willow Springs, DVNP

Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue's Wild Burro Project

In March of 2018, I went before PVDR's Board of Trustees and asked permission to take us from a passive rescue (one that waits to be asked) to an aggressive one, in regards to wild burros. With the BLM being overcrowded and so many unchecked burro populations in the American Southwest, I felt it was only a matter of time before some government agencies resorted to drastic measures to control the populations. All agencies have the ability to shoot the burros as a means of population control. Shooting a burro is much cheaper than catching it, feeding it, training it and hopefully finding it a home.

Our Burro Management Program has many components. Besides complete removal of wild burro populations, we can do nuisance control, burro tracking with radio collars, genetic infusion by replacing older jacks with ones from other regions and mitigation where we remove or adjust the things that bring the burros into certain areas where they are a problem. To learn more visit: www.burromanagement.com

We have also launched two scientific teams to study burros and their impact. The first team is made up of veterinarians and researchers from some of the most notable veterinary schools in the country, this team is headed by Eric Davis, DVM. Their research will focus on burro health issues, parasites and how they are controlled in nature versus in a farm setting and blood comparisons between domestic and wild stock. Our second team of researchers is headed by PhD student Erick Lundgren. Their mission is to study the impacts the burros have on the desert ecosystem, both positive and negative.

A part of the shift in policy meant that we had to be able to bring in large numbers of burros at once. While we will discuss the methods of capture later, it is important to note that the burros populations currently range in the thousands. As we move into different areas, we had to have the resources to handle the inflow. To this end, we developed a Transportation and Training Hub in Scenic, AZ, just outside of Death Valley and another one in Concord, VA.

Aside from training, these hubs are also responsible for taking adoptable donkeys to all of the Satellite Adoption Centers in the their Region. Satellite Adoption Centers (SACs) are volunteer operated centers where our donkeys are placed into pre-screened homes all across the country. The SAC manager operates under our policies and procedures and is charged with keeping tabs on all of the adopted donkeys in their area. This has been a great success and allows us to be a local rescue, all across the country.

If you are interested in the Satellite Program visit: www.satellitecenter.org

TEXAS
BNH-3069

The Reconnaissance

Starting November 2017, Bean (my corgi) and I began our Burro-Recon project to identify quantities and locations of the burros in Death Valley and the Mojave National Preserve. In 2018, I spent more time away from Amy than I spent with her. It was a very difficult task but one I am well qualified for. For more than 20 years, I have been studying and hiking the deserts of California. I have a great deal of knowledge of the topography, water sources, burro habits as well as the history of the Park.

Aside from actually counting the burros, I also had to identify trap locations and submit their GPS coordinates to the Park Service. Prior to any mobilization, each location had to be cleared for any environmental and historical significance. I also had to make determinations on how we would get the burros out of the trap areas as many of their favorite places are in the most remote regions of the Parks.

While I was living with the burros, I came to know more than a few on an individual basis. Early on, they were very wary of me and my camera. As time went on, they grew to accept me as a non-threat and I was able to shoot some amazing photographs, allowing me to spread their message through my photography.

Many people are conflicted on the burro removal project, none more than myself. It is important to note that the National Park Service can use lethal control the burros if that is the only means available to comply with their policies. Like most of the Department of the Interior, the Park Service is underfunded and has no allocation for burro removal, which means this project's cost is 100% Peaceful Valley's responsibility. We are asking the public, those that explore our deserts, to call in burro sightings. This will be a significant help and save our resources for the actual capture.

My film partner and I are working on a Wild Burro Documentary. Much like my books and photographs, we are hoping the film will help spread the word and create more appreciation and compassion for America's Wild Burros. We have also been asked to help address the Australian wild donkey issues by creating a film and a social media campaign down under.

To report burro sightings call 866-366-5731, email wildburros@pvdr.org or visit www.burro-recon.com.

You can view my photography by visiting: www.burro.photography
Photographs are available for purchase (all proceeds benefit PVDR) by visiting www.donkeyrescue.com

"Big Glass" Butte Valley, DVNP (Photo by Mike Brown)

The Capture

It costs $1,000 for Peaceful Valley to rescue a donkey. After thousands upon thousands of rescue cases since December of 2000, we have it down to a science. This $1,000 price tag includes:

Transportation
Processing (vaccines, de-worming, microchip, ear tag) Freeze Brand
Castration
One year of feed
Six months of training

The wild card in the Wild Burro Project is the capture. Historical data from previous Death Valley captures show that the cost of a burro capture can range from $200 to $2,500 depending on the stage of the project. Early on, when the burros are plentiful, you might catch 60%-70% within a few weeks. The expense increases when you attempt to catch the remainder. It takes the same resources but once the burros become wary, the captures are farther apart and in smaller numbers.

Our preferred method of capture is bait and water traps. A corral is set up at or near an existing water source, or we bring a water trailer in. The corral is equipped with Finger Gates (see photo opposite). In the beginning the gates are tied open and bait is placed and re-baited daily. As the burros become more accustomed to the corral the gates are closed gradually each day until the donkey must push on the gate to enter. Once inside, they cannot leave. We will often times make a smaller pen within the trap so that we can add additional burros until we have a sufficient quantity to trailer out to our staging area.

Bait traps are the lowest stress trap in our arsenal. Unduly stressing the burros just makes it that much harder to train them later. We try very hard to keep the experience as positive as it can be. The stress of being caught, hauled and handled can be debilitating to the burros, so we are extra careful. The opposite page shows a photograph of the contractors setting up a trap in Butte Valley which is located in the southwest corner of Death Valley. This is accessible only by high clearance four wheel drive vehicles. These traps are located roughly five miles from our staging area in Warm Springs Canyon. It took our drivers nine hours to drive to the traps, load the burros, then bring them back to camp.

The use of helicopters and drones is sometimes necessary in rough terrain. On National Parks, we cannot drive outside of established roadways, therefore we have to be able to bring the burros to us.

"The Trap" Butte Valley, DVNP

The Staging Area

Once the burros are caught, they are moved to a nearby staging area. Here, the burros receive a microchip on the left side of their neck, a RFID (radio frequency identification) ear tag in the left ear. They receive their first vaccine, a de-worming agent and they have all of their physical characteristics recorded.

This includes:

Age, Sex, Color and capture Capture Location

All of this information is then uploaded to our Online data system. While in staging, a licensed veterinarian draws blood for testing for equine infectious disease. No equine can be transported without having a "negative coggins" and a current health certificate. Once the paperwork has been received, the burros are transported to our Scenic Facility for quarantine of at least 3 weeks. Prior to leaving quarantine, the burros are given a booster vaccine and a PV freeze brand. All whole jacks (uncastrated male donkeys) will eventually be transported to San Angelo, Texas to await castration.

Peaceful Valley does not allow any breeding of our donkeys. We will not adopt a jennet (female donkey) to anyone with an intact male equine. All jacks, with very few exceptions, are castrated. These exceptions are extreme age or another complicating medical condition. These jacks are kept separated away from any contact with jennets. Castrations are performed twice per year, in the Spring and Fall, by fourth year veterinary students from Texas A&M University Veterinary School in College Station, Texas and assisted by Vet Tech students from Blinn College. It is a very beneficial program and hundreds of students have learned to perform the procedure correctly.

Staging is an extremely important part of the burro's acclimation to domestic life. This is where they will have daily positive contact with people. They will learn to eat out of elevated feed troughs and hay feeders. They will also learn to drink out of water troughs with automatic fill valves. As each new experience can be alarming, our staff monitors each burro during this process to ensure that they are eating and drinking each day. Burros can easily suffer from liver failure if they do not eat over a prolonged period.

As much of our work is in National Parks, our staging areas are often accessible to the public. We must provide around the clock security for the well being of the burros. While we encourage visitor's curiosity and questions, we need to make sure they are staying a safe distance away from the corrals. Burros are able to jump tall fences and we would not want them to feel pressured enough to try to escape.

Freeze Branding

Freeze Branding is a technique where a branding iron is soaked in liquid nitrogen for 15-20 minutes. The area to be branded is shaved and cleaned with alcohol. The brand is applied for 20-25 seconds. Freeze branding is almost painless and is far superior to heat branding that most people are familiar with. The cold from the iron kills the hair follicle's ability to produce color and turns the hair white.

The purpose of the brand is so that Brand Inspectors, sale barns and others will know that this is a Peaceful Valley donkey and cannot be legally sold. Even when adopted, the donkey must be returned to PVDR if the adopter can no longer care for it. This allows us to make a lifetime commitment to each wild burro entering into our system.

China at one time had the world's largest donkey population, that population has since dwindled due to the high demand for donkey hides. Slaughtering as many as 4,000,000 each year and with an unfulfilled demand of 10,000,000 hides per year, it is only a matter of time before our donkeys will be put into the slaughter pipeline. America's Wild Burros deserve more than to be destroyed for their hides. The current level of donkey consumption is unsustainable and will lead to the decimation of the world's donkey populations.

The donkey hides are boiled down into a black gelatin and is the main ingredient of a traditional Chinese medicine called Ejiao. Ejiao is administered by dissolving it in hot water. In other forms it can be mixed with almonds and sesame seeds and served as a snack. The Chinese believe that Ejiao is a cure for bleeding, dizziness, insomnia and dry cough. Although the product has been around for many years, a recent resurgence has occurred due to one company's marketing plan. Supply can no long keep up with demand and donkeys are being stolen and sold on the black market all across Africa. Many African nations have banned the export of donkeys all together as their populations rely on the donkey for transportation and farming.

There are those in the agricultural industry that feel that slaughter is a reasonable means to remove excess animals, both donkey and horse. In the United States, equine slaughter was stopped in 2007. It was not made illegal, but rather the USDA inspectors were de-funded. Without inspectors, the meat could not be sold for consumption. On average, 70,000 horses cross the borders with Canada and Mexico for the sole purpose of slaughter with exports to European and Asian Markets. With the de-funding of inspectors, well meaning people did not end horse slaughter, they just increased the travel time the horses must endure.

As a sign of solidarity, PVDR's Executive Staff all got "PV" tattoos.

Transition from the Wild to Domestic Life

Everything about a freshly captured burro's life is a dramatic change. Consider a burro who has only ever drunk from a spring. Drinking from an automatically fed water trough is a new experience and one that must be approached delicately. If not, the burro may become too traumatized to drink putting further stress on their system. Another big change is the acceptance of fencing. Care must be taken in choosing the correct fencing materials so that the burros cannot run through it and escape. Typically we like to keep the newly arrived burros in six feet high steel corral panels that are securely bolted together. Burros are great jumpers and can clear five feet from a standstill. PVDR includes a secondary fence whenever wild burros are concerned.

Human interaction is always the most difficult transition. Donkeys at our facilities typically live in herds of one hundred donkeys. Our San Angelo Facility can easily accommodate 1,000+ at one given time. Taking a wild burro out of a large herd and then placing them in a one on one training session is asking an awful lot. In order to ease this transition, the burros are taken from the large herd and placed in smaller pens in groups of ten. This forces more human interaction but still allows the burro a certain amount of safety distance. Treats are at first broadcast around their new pen. Once they realize how great an animal cracker tastes, it is not long before they will take one from your hand. Usually after a couple of weeks, the burros are ready for one on one sessions to begin. In order for a donkey to be considered adoptable, it must:

Be friendly
Accept a halter
Stand tied
Walk on lead
Pick up all four hooves for trimming.

We use an A-F grading system on each ability. In order for the adoption program to be successful, the donkeys must be kept manageable. Veterinarians and Farriers do not like to work on animals that do not behave. If we adopt out a wild animal, we can be assured that the animal will not receive necessary care. Overgrown hooves are one of the most common signs of neglect in the donkeys that we rescue.

With our Satellite Adoption Center network, we have been able to place donkeys into loving homes all across the United States.

If you would like to learn more about our Adoption Program visit: www.donkeyadoption.org

What happens to the burros that do not make the grade or are simply too wild or dangerous?

Don't worry, we have them covered as well. Peaceful Valley maintains a network of sanctuaries throughout Texas and Louisiana. Holding 2,000-3,000 donkeys at anyone time these 20+ locations are a great way for formerly wild burros to retain a sense of freedom.

These sanctuaries were created out of desperation during the extreme Texas drought in 2011. Donkey abandonment was at an all time high and they were simply coming in faster than we could move them into the adoption program. Initially, it was a hard program to get off the ground. Most Texas ranchers didn't trust our intentions and thought we might drop off a bunch of donkeys on their land and never return. During the drought, sale barns refused to allow donkeys to be unloaded because they simply would not sell. The owners would often abandon the donkeys at the auctions. Texas Sheriff Departments were overrun with abandoned donkeys being dumped along highways or even cutting fences and dumping them on other people's land. In one year alone, PVDR responded to hundreds of Sheriff Department cases involving over 1,000 donkeys all throughout Texas.

We typically prefer to keep around 100 donkeys on 500 acre pastures. Quality fences and water are a must. Zac Williams, our Vice President of Off-Site Operations has a degree in Animal Science as well as range management. He assesses how many donkeys can be allowed at each location. The Lease Contract between PVDR and the land owner allows for the contract to be canceled at anytime with two weeks notice. This will prevent the donkeys from overgrazing should another severe weather event effect us.

The donkeys on the sanctuaries receive the exact same medical care that the donkeys on our other facilities receive. Vaccines, de-worming, and regular dental and hoof care. PVDR pays $15 per donkey per month. Even with the health care, that is still less than $200 per donkey each year. That is 1/10th the cost of the BLM's program and they are allowed to retain their sense of freedom. PVDR has a portable corral system that can be moved from location to location to facilitate the medical and hoof treatments. Teeth are checked annually and those donkeys needing dental work are taken back to San Angelo to be worked on by equine dentists.

Each time the donkeys are gathered for health inspections and treatment they are reassessed to see if they are ready to transition into the training program. We do not want to support tens of thousands of burros on sanctuary, but would prefer to see them all go on to loving homes. To learn more about the grazing lease program visit www.grazinglease.org

"Aces" Wildrose Canyon, DVNP

OLD PANNING
SWEET SHOPPE

Wild Burros are constantly on the move, from water source to water source grazing along the way. These travels will often times take them into people's yards, into camp sites, into trash cans and inevitably across major and minor roadways. Wild Burro deaths from vehicle accidents are not recorded by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, I receive reports from all across the country and estimate the number to be in the hundreds each year. In the winter months, the burros are attracted to the asphalt roads as they retain heat from the sun during the colder nights. They are also know to frequently cross highways and get struck. An average wild burro can weigh between 450-600 pounds and stand around 4 feet at the highest point of the back. This is a serious threat to human life when these wrecks occur.

Burros accustomed to human interaction, like those at the hot springs in Saline Valley, the northeast corner of Death Valley National Park, can quickly become a nuisance. Tourists offer them treats, fruit and vegetables. Once they learn to accept these gifts, the burros lose their wariness and become much more bold. They are know to tip over trash cans, raid coolers and even take things from open rear hatches and truck beds. Many people do not appreciate these behaviors and will often times try to drive the burros off using rocks and other items. Needless to say, these interactions are not in the burro's best interests.

Another area of conflict is on both sides of Parker Dam on the Arizona/California border. As a tourist attraction the Dam draws in a lot of out of towners who find the burros cute. They will often feed them, sometimes from their cars, allowing the burros to stand along and in the roadway. Locals get very frustrated with this as the burros will block traffic and make their daily commute much longer. Some communities in the area welcome the burros and have set up feeding locations to try and keep the burros off their yards and remain outside of the neighborhood.

Oatman, Arizona is probably the best known place in the country for burro encounters. Built along historic Route 66, Oatman is still a tourist hot spot because of the herd of burros that live there. The burros are very people savvy, but not necessarily friendly. They can recognize the brown paper sacks that the vendors sell of donkey treats. They will often jostle one another and try to rip the bag from the tourist's hand. The burros will walk up on the sidewalks and enter stores if not pushed out. Sadly, there are many reports of foals being stolen from their mothers. These burros really cannot be considered wild as they have been domesticated into a tourist attraction. I think it is safe to say that without the burros, Oatman would cease to exist.

"Window Shopping" Oatman, AZ

DonkeyAdoption DonkeyRescue DonkeyRescue DonkeyRescueTV

Peaceful Valley's Mission is to provide a safe and loving environment to all donkeys that have been abused, neglected or abandoned and wild burros under threat of destruction.

Peaceful Valley strives to provide solutions to the many problems that plague these wonderful creatures by providing ethical stewardship over the funds that are necessary to fulfill this goal.

Peaceful Valley, with its nationwide network of Ranch Facilities and Satellite Adoption Centers, is the country's leader in Rescue, Sanctuary, Adoption and Education.

Together, we can improve the Plight of the American Donkey.

Celebrating 70 Years Of The Death Valley '49ers

How It All Began

In 1948 California Governor Earl Warren appointed a California Centennial Commission for planning events in 1849 to celebrate the centennial of the State of California. When the preliminary list of events was published, the supervisors of Southern California realized that the major events were scheduled for Northern California. The supervisors of Los Angeles, Kern, San Bernardino and Inyo Counties decided that there needed to be a major event in Southern California and Death Valley was chosen as the location. To plan this major event Board of Directors was established and named The Death Valley 49ers Inc.

Why Death Valley

Who would ever come to such a remote place to hear the story of the Death Valley Wagon Train of 1849-50? The story was well known by many in Southern California. The heroism of those pioneers was an inspiration to all Californians and it was fitting that their story be the impetus for the Death Valley 1949 Centennial Celebration.

The Pageant

Planning for the pageant began and it was a major undertaking. A script had to be written, a production staff established, narrators and actors had to be found. Desolation Canyon was selected as the location and Jimmy Stewart was the main narrator. Ferde Grofe' wrote the Death Valley Suite while staying at the Furnace Creek Inn. Stands were constructed for 6,000 people. As the December 5 date approached the committee became concerned if they over estimated the possible crowd. Little did they know that approximately 65,000 people would find their way to Death Valley. Now this we celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the Death Valley '49ers Encampments.

Marv Jensen

"Hello There" Anvil Spring, DVNP (photo by Amy L. Meyers)

How Can You Be Involved?

The Death Valley '49ers will celebrate the 70th Encampment in November of 2019. Since our modest beginnings, our organization has come a long way in supporting the commitments and principles of the National Park system.

Strong leadership, many fine people, great membership, community involvement, a solid foundation, and very dedicated volunteers; these are the trails and backbone of our success.

Bob Logsdon

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If you are interested in joining the Death Valley '49ers, desire additional information regarding the encampment, or would like to purchase published Keepsakes, you can visit the Death Valley '49ers website:

www.deathvalley49ers.org

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The Death Valley '49ers is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that seeks to expand public awareness of Death Valley. We have no headquarters office, equipment, vehicles, paid staff or employees.

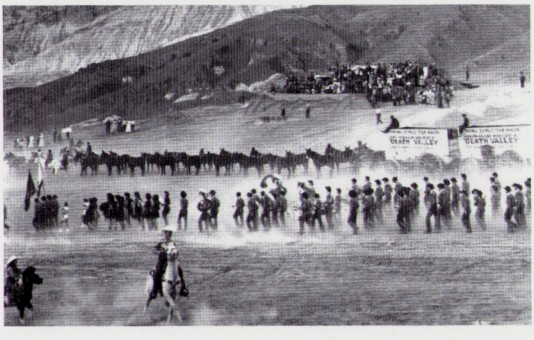
Death Valley is a highly valued national resource and recreational area that is protected and preserved by the National Park Service and others for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The aim of the Death Valley '49ers is to foster appreciation of Death Valley as a rare desert environment having unique natural and cultural histories, which played an important role in the settlement of the west and the addition of California to the Union.

Death Valley '49ers, How It All Began

It was Saturday evening December 3, 1949, in desolation Canyon, Death Valley, California. The sun had disappeared behind the Panamint Range. In its wake, a web of rays tipped the Funeral Range to the east and lighted a smoky haze of dust that hung above the canyon. Under the cloud, people moved, thousands of them. They poured from the scene of the California Centennial Pageant to a sea of automobiles that spread across the desert floor from the canyon's mouth. A flood of humanity estimated at over 60,000 had come to Death Valley from all parts of the country. They camped on the desert, they camped in the folds of the canyon, they slept in their cars, trailers, wagons, tents, in blankets laid on the hard earth, their tiny fires flickered all through the night as far as the eye could see.

The fantastic success of the pageant had evolved from a lot of planning and doing since a Saturday luncheon in November of 1948 at Ridgecrest, California. On that occasion, delegates representing the counties of Inyo, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and Kern counties met to ponder how they would observe California's statehood. The decision was to hold a pageant in Death Valley to also commemorate the 1849 wagon train. The first thing they did was to organize under the banner of Death Valley '49ers, Inc. The success of the event exceeded everyone's expectations. During the wrap-up meeting, a delegate remarked that the response had been so natural and enthusiastic as to warrant continuance of the organization. In 1950 a meeting was held in Death Valley to continue the event that has become the Encampment.

This year we celebrate the 70th Encampment. Since the beginning in 1949 the Encampment has become a major event featuring one of the oldest art shows in the west and with outstanding western musical entertainment. The continuation of the Encampment depends on your support. Please consider becoming a member of the Death Valley '49ers.



The 1949 Centennial Pageant celebrating the spirit of the California pioneers. Photo by Floyd R. Evans.

DEATH VALLEY '49ERS
NON-PROFIT CORP.